



On Ibn Rushd's Affirmation of Direction for Allah¹

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Ibn Rushd³ said in his *Manāhij al-Adilla*⁴:

“And [as for] the doubt which the deniers of ‘*al-jihā*’ (direction) used to reject it, is that they held that affirming direction necessitates a place, and affirming a place necessitates the affirmation of a form [corporeality] (*jismīyyah*). But we say that all of this is not necessitated, for direction is something other than a place and this is because direction is either the surfaces of an object itself which encompass it (and they are six) and it is from this that we say that (material) things have a ‘bottom’, ‘top’, ‘right’, ‘left’, ‘front’ and ‘behind’, or (direction) is the surfaces of another object which encompass the first object from the six directions. As for the surfaces which are of the body itself, they do not constitute a place/location for the body itself, fundamentally. But as for those surfaces of another object/matter which encompass and surround it then they constitute a ‘place/location’ for it. An example is like the surfaces and planes of the winds/atmosphere which surround man or the surfaces of the celestial bodies (planets) which surround the winds/atmosphere—these too constitute a place for the winds/atmosphere. These celestial bodies

¹ Taken from *al-Kāshif al-Ṣaghīr*

² Biography available at: <http://www.marifah.net/articles/saidfoudah.pdf>

³ Ibn Rushd, known in European literature as Averroes is Abū al-Walīd Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Rushd al-Faylasuf (b. 1126 CE, Cordoba - d. 1198 CE).

⁴ Full name: *Al-Kashf ‘an Manāhij al-Adilla fī ‘Aqā’id al-Milla* - the Exposition of the Methods of Proof Concerning the Beliefs of the Community.

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too, some of them encompass and surround others (due to their orbits etc.) and (as such) constitute a 'place/location' for them.

As for the external surface of a celestial body, it has been demonstrated that it is not outside of it with a form of itself, because if that was the case then that outer form too would have to have another form outside of that, and this would go on and on till it never ends [*ad infinitum*]. Therefore, the surfaces of the extreme ends of the universe do not constitute a place, since it is not possible to find another 'object/form' (*jism*) there (i.e. outside of it, after its end has been reached). Thus, if evidence is established to prove the existence of something in this location, it should exist there without a form (*jism*), for that which prevents its existence there, is the exact opposite of what the people presume it to be..."

This is a very weakly-grounded argument, because he claimed that direction [*jihā*] does not necessitate place, and that place does not necessitate corporeality—and this is false. The inherent link between direction and place is clarified by the theologians' definition of place, for they say that a *ḥayyiz* (boundary) is a place and that a place is a conceptual void (*farāgh*) occupied by an extended substance. As for direction, it is the relative connection of "where" between two substances or two limited/bounded things; therefore it is an ascription. Thus it is not possible to imagine a thing in a direction that is not bounded/limited. This view is correct even according to the philosophers—as we explained earlier.

If we say that Allah is encompassed by directions it will necessitate immediately that He is limited. Ibn Rushd neglected to mention this inherent link between direction and limitation, for had he mentioned it—due to its clarity—his own view would have been invalidated and his words would have been demolished. So anyone who says that Allah, the Exalted, is in a direction is forced by necessary implication to state that He is limited. But Ibn Rushd did not have the audacity to claim that Allah, the Exalted, is limited.

On the other hand, Ibn Taymiyya grasped the inherent link between direction and limit [*ḥadd*], and so admitting to the implication of affirming a limit if a direction is affirmed, he affirmed limit and direction...

...As for Ibn Rushd, he avoided mentioning a boundary for Allah, the Exalted, and he fled from its consequences, sufficing with the affirmation of direction alone; but this is a mere fallacy. His intent behind the affirmation of direction for Allah, the Exalted, is to merely oppose

and object to his adversaries among the Ash'arīs, that he may pave the way for bringing the philosophical thought of Aristotle into Islamic thought.

But when he admitted and accepted direction, he was obliged—according the views of all, including the philosophers—to affirm a limit for Allah, the Exalted, in every direction. And to affirm a direction for Allah, the Exalted, and to affirm a limit from all directions implies the affirmation of a position [*waḍa'*]¹—that is, a position in relation to other bounded things. This implication is obvious and neither Ibn Rushd nor any other can escape it.

So after all this, would it be possible for him to say that the affirmation of a direction for Allah, the Exalted, does not imply corporeality for Him, the Exalted? To affirm a direction and simply run away from affirming corporeality and limit is an inane fallacy that can only come from absurd thought...

He tried to flee from this argument by saying that a substance (*jism*) is that which occupies space, and he defined space—as did the philosophers—as the internal surface of a substance that encompasses the external surface of another, and accordingly, he was able to claim that Allah, the Exalted, is in a direction but not in a place, because it is impossible that He be encompassed by other substances. But this justification is false for we have stated that direction necessitates limitation and place as defined by the theologians.

As for the meaning of place according to the philosophers, it is an implication of the argument of motion, and motion takes place either in a location [within the surrounding surface] or between locations [i.e. between point A and point B]. In the case of the latter, motion is attributed to whatever is in a location, whereas in the former, motion is acceptable for both the one with place and the one without a place.

Consequently, Ibn Rushd's affirmation of direction for Allah, the Exalted, also implies that he affirmed position for Him as well; therefore, he should have allowed for Him [to be described] as a continuously and endlessly locative moving object—and this is the peak of odiousness.

If we realize the inherent link between direction and limitation and between limitation and location—being aware that something bounded in one direction must also be bounded in six directions—the inherent link between corporeality and direction will be clear.

Notice that the philosophers said that the thing which is limited by directions must be a substance. So, had Ibn Rushd said that Allah, the Exalted, is above the highest celestial sphere

and that Allah is in a direction with respect to this celestial sphere, that would mean that the celestial sphere [too] is in a direction with respect to Allah, the Exalted—and Allah would be limited by all directions and not by the first celestial sphere. So this necessarily implies—even according to the view of the philosophers—that Allah is a corporeal body.

According to the philosophers, that which is limited must be contingent in itself [*mumkin fī dhātihī*]; and since everything that is in a direction must be limited, Ibn Rushd was obliged by necessary implication to say that Allah, too, is contingent in Himself because He is in a direction. Since the philosophers stated that the limit/extremity of all directions is the external surface of a sphere, it follows that there is no direction above this extremity (or it would not be an extremity); but Ibn Rushd's words contradict this, for he agrees with them on the issue of limit/extremity but contradicts them by stating that Allah is in a direction. By rational implication he is obliged to either affirm that Allah is inside the celestial sphere or that the celestial sphere is not limited by the directions; and since the philosophers affirmed—according to their view—that the extremity must be one surface and spherical, Ibn Rushd is forced by necessary implication to affirm that Allah is spherical and that He *is* the extremity—and no intelligent person would utter such odiousness—although I assert that this is the closest view to the doctrine of Ibn Rushd.

